

PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

18 March 1985

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 3-A**NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL**

Air lanes over Iran 'prohibited'

Iraq says airlines will be in danger

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United Press International

Iraq declared yesterday that Iranian airspace was a "prohibited zone" and warned that commercial airliners flying over Iran faced the danger of being shot down.

Expanding the war into a new area involving civilians, the Iraqi News Agency issued a military communique warning commercial airliners to avoid Iranian airspace beginning at noon tomorrow, eastern standard time.

Proclaiming a "prohibited zone over Iran," Baghdad said it might shoot down planes and would not take responsibility for any that were attacked.

"Any air target that flies in Iranian airspace will be exposed to direct danger because of difficulty in distinguishing real targets from airlines and the dogfights that might happen anytime," the news agency said.

British Airways in London canceled all its flights to Tehran and Baghdad "indefinitely" on the advice of the British government.

Other international carriers serving Tehran include Air France, Lufthansa, Swissair, Turkish Airlines, Austrian Airlines, Syrian Arab Airlines and the Soviet airline Aeroflot, as well as Iran's own national carrier.

In the Persian Gulf, shipping insurers Lloyds of London said the Liberian-registered tanker Caribbean Breeze was attacked and set ablaze yesterday in the Persian Gulf about 50 miles east of the gulf state of Qatar.

Shipping sources in Kuwait said the 109,752-ton tanker, loaded with 240,000 tons of Kuwaiti oil, was attacked by a single unidentified aircraft, injuring four crew members, including the captain.

Neither Iraq nor Iran claimed responsibility for the latest attack. In the past, Iraq has claimed responsibility for its attacks, including many never confirmed. Iran has never publicly announced its ship attacks.

The fire was extinguished, and the tanker was towed to the port of Dubai, the sources said.

Last year, Iraq extended the war into the gulf by declaring a forbidden zone around Iran's main oil export terminal at Kharg Island, starting the so-called "tanker war."

The Caribbean Breeze was the sixth confirmed shipping casualty this year and the 128th neutral vessel ship hit since February 1984.

On the battlefield, Iran said it had crushed an Iraqi counterattack in the Hawizeh marshlands and taken control of the entire marsh south of the Iraqi town of Amarah. It did not, however, specify its territorial gains.

In Baghdad, an Iraqi military statement said Iraqi forces "continued advancing on Iranian front lines and crushing their positions." Iran started an offensive in the area last Monday.

Iraq also said its warplanes carried out "intensive" air and missile raids on seven Iranian towns and cities, including the Iranian capital of Tehran.

Iran confirmed six attacks but said anti-aircraft fire stopped Iraqi planes from dropping their bombs on Tehran.

Iran's state-run news agency IRNA said at least five people were killed and 15 others wounded in Iraqi air raids on Kermanshah and reported at least 13 killed and 80 wounded in the attack on Dezful.

Both nations have in the past exaggerated their war claims.

In London, the Sunday Times reported that the United States, officially neutral in the war, has been passing intelligence information to Iraq regarding approaching Iranian air attacks.